



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for Lake Mary Ronan State Park Improvement Project

**MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region One
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901**

October 16, 2009

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing to complete various campground improvements at Lake Mary Ronan (LMR) State Park. The improvements primarily consist of the following:

- 1) Correct the grade, elevations, and realignment of some existing campsites;
- 2) Pave the existing Lake Mary Ronan State Park camping area road, campsite spurs, and host sites;
- 3) Relocate the group use camping area to a site adjacent to the campground and then convert the present group use site to additional boat trailer parking;
- 4) Install campsite electrical pedestals and electrical infrastructure improvements within the campground; and
- 5) Replace an existing wooden vault latrine within the campground with a sealed ADA-accessible concrete vault latrine.

Public Process

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an environmental assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on August 24, 2009.

The public was notified in the following manners to comment on the draft EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: the *Helena Independent Record*, the *Daily Inter Lake*, and the *Lake County Leader*;
- One statewide press release;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web site: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.
- 30-day public comment period following publication of the second legal notice.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having few potential impacts.

Summary of public comment

Four individuals submitted comments during the 30-day comment period. One comment expressed support for the project in regard to electricity, one comment was nonsupportive, one comment did not address the project directly, and the other only briefly mentioned the paving.

- The supportive comment addressed only the installation of electrical pedestals and was provided by visitors who came to camp and were able use the only campsite with electricity available. They stated, "We are both in our late 60s and as warm as it is, we were not going to be there without air. Even tho we have a generator, we know how people feel about campers running them...As my husband and I get older, the heat bothers us more and more, and we will be going to Glacier or other places to camp, so we can have electricity and use the air conditioner. Most of the private campgrounds between here and Glacier are either closed or only want bigger motor homes so that leaves a lot of us either going someplace else or staying home."
- One comment referred primarily to a fish cleaning station and mentioned keeping spacing between campsites. " Fish cleaning station. We need it and keep it simple... Keep the camp space apart like they are now." (J. Mager & friends, Somers, Montana)

FWP Response: A fish cleaning station is not part of the proposed project.

- One comment noted that the hosts were great and post scripted, i.e. "P.S. If you pave the roads be sure to put in lots of speed bumps." (W. Reid, Kalispell, Montana)

FWP Response: The need for speed bumps will be evaluated over time. If excess speed becomes an issue in the campground, they will be considered for future installation.

- Regarding the one nonsupportive comment, some of the complaints and criticisms did not relate directly to the project. Those points are not addressed. Consequently there are gaps in the numbering and lettering.

Items deemed relevant to the project:

2. I doubt any one would object to upgrading the sanitary facility. But examining the way you have chosen to present your "facts," you only casually mention the "gypsy" campers who have crowded the west shore for most of the summer. Is the state doing anything about the obvious sewage problem they present? Why not? From your proposal it would seem you're afraid people would complain, and the last thing FWP wants is to upset those who want what they want no matter who bears the burden, so, the gypsy campers are simply taking advantage of the situation, knowing FWP doesn't have the guts to do anything about damage to the lake. Meantime, we're suckin' sewage.

FWP Response: The referenced area used on the west shore of the lake by the so-called "gypsy campers" is privately owned and not under FWP control.

4. You made the statement that nothing had been done to upgrade the park for years. What property-owning taxpayers have seen and paid for are things like:

(Points condensed and/or paraphrased.)

A. The fence line surveyed and barbwire fence installed.

FWP Response: The park boundary was fenced on the west side to prevent further encroachment of private structures and equipment.

B. Campsites added.

FWP Response: No designated campsites have been added to the campground since the original campground construction.

C. Major boat ramp overhaul...

FWP Response: The boat ramp was improved two years ago due to its deteriorated condition. While FWP has made minor improvements over the years at the park in general, the campground infrastructure has not had significant improvements in many years.

D. The trees were thinned after 40 years of neglect... we are now seeing thistles, burrs and knapweed, you name it.

FWP Response: Noxious weeds have occurred in some locations due to ground disturbance from last year's thinning project. These areas were chemically treated this fall and will be treated again next spring in conjunction with the FWP state-wide noxious weed management plan.

H. The paved road in the park gets plowed in the winter, while the county road accessing it is ignored. Your project seems to add more road to plow.

FWP Response: This project does not add any additional road length for winter plowing. The road from the park entrance to the lake and a small part of the camp loop has been plowed by FWP personnel for several years to provide access for ice fishing and limited winter camping opportunities. Lake County plows the road that passes the park entrance and beyond to the private residences. This project will not add plowing mileage for the Lake County Road Department.

A. You mention no limits on the size and number of vehicles that could be attracted to the park. But 25 more people can be accommodated in the proposed group area.

FWP Response: Park capacity is set by the number of vehicle parking spaces and number of campsites. The proposal includes expanding boat trailer parking to accommodate an additional 6-8 boat trailers to the existing 11 spaces currently available. At present, during the peak season, once the parking lot is full, vehicles and trailers must park alongside the main road to the lake. These vehicles congest traffic flow. Having a designated place to park will improve traffic flow and enhance visitor safety. The project involves realigning and further delineating existing sites. There are no additional individual campsites proposed. Therefore maximum capacity for the

campground will remain the same. The existing group camping area will be replaced with a new group camping area.

C. You state there are annually 20,000 visitors to the lake. What is that based on? Could you possibly be specific before you waste our tax dollars?

FWP Response: Visitation is based on car counter data and daily campground logs. The electronic counter is located just inside the park entrance. Periodic sampling is done to obtain an average number of visitors per vehicle. Additionally, Camp hosts maintain a daily visitation log during the peak use season. It is important to note that no general fund tax dollars will be used to complete this project.

6 B. Compliance with the Disabilities Act could be met by installing one unit next to the camp host.

FWP Response: The camp host site is not located within the campground loop area. It makes more sense to have the site located in the campground in order to provide access to an existing vault latrine. An ADA site in a location outside the campground would require the expense of a separate ADA-accessible vault toilet and would isolate campers from other campers in the park.

Decision

Based on the analysis in the EA, I find Alternative B, to proceed with campground improvements as proposed, to be the preferred alternative. I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. The final EA may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, Kalispell, Montana. Please direct requests and questions to Jerry Sawyer, Flathead Lake District Park Manager, (406) 751-4575 or e-mail to jsawyer@mt.gov

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620



Dave Landstrom
Regional Parks Manager

October 16, 2009

Date